IN THE HIGH COURT OF GUJARAT AT AHMEDABAD

SPECIAL CIVIL APPLICATION No 6374 of 2004

For Approval and Signature:

HON'BLE MR.JUSTICE P.B.MAJMUDAR

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1. Whether Reporters of Local Papers may be allowed to see the judgements? : NO

2. To be referred to the Reporter or not? : NO

3. Whether Their Lordships wish to see the fair copy of the judgement? : NO

4. Whether this case involves a substantial question of law as to the interpretation of the Constitution of India, 1950 of any Order made thereunder? : NO

5. Whether it is to be circulated to the concerned Magistrate/Magistrates,Judge/Judges,Tribunal/Tribunals? : NO

ANILBHAI CHHAGANBHAI MAHARAJ

Versus

STATE OF GUJARAT

Appearance:

1. Special Civil Application No. 6374 of 2004

MS SUBHADRA G PATEL for Petitioner No. 1

MR AY KOGJE, LD.AGP for Respondent No. 1-3

CORAM : HON'BLE MR.JUSTICE P.B.MAJMUDAR

Date of decision: 10/08/2004

ORAL JUDGEMENT

1. Leave to amend by correcting the name of the petitioner.

2. By filing this petition, the petitioner-detenu, has challenged his detention order dated 17.2.2004, by which he is detained as a "bootlegger", under the Gujarat Prevention of Anti-social Activities Act, 1985 ("PASA", for short). Along with the detention order, the

petitioner has also been served with the grounds of detention.

3. In the grounds of detention, there is a reference about two criminal cases registered against the petitioner under the Bombay Prohibition Act. It is alleged against the petitioner that, the petitioner is dealing in foreign liquor and violating the provisions of the Bombay Prohibition Act. After considering the aforesaid case, and after considering the statements of two witnesses, whose names have not been disclosed to the petitioner, the authority has detained the petitioner as a "bootlegger" under PASA.

4. Learned advocate for the petitioner submitted that, before claiming privilege under Sec.9(2) of the PASA, the authority is required to undergo certain exercise by finding out the antecedents of the detenu and that there should be credible material before coming to the conclusion that if the names of the witnesses are disclosed by claiming privilege under Section 9(2) of the PASA, the detenu may harm the said witnesses. It is submitted that, before claiming the privilege under sec.9(2) of the PASA, the authority has not tried to verify about the credentials and character of the detenu. It is further submitted that the privilege is claimed in a routine manner and, therefore, without any basis, the authority has tried to withhold the names of witnesses and as a result of that, the petitioner is denied the valuable right of making effective representation. To substantiate her say, learned advocate for the petitioner has relied upon the decision of this Court rendered in the case of KISHOR NAGINBHAI PARMAR v. STATE OF GUJARAT, reported in 2000 (4) GLR 3236, wherein it is held in para 11 as under :

> "11. In this view of the matter, the detaining authority while exercising powers under Section 9 (2) of the P.A.S.A.Act for claiming privilege is expected to consider the general background, character, antecedents, criminal tendency of propensity etc. of the detenu. In the instant case, if affidavit or the grounds of detention are considered, all that is recorded by the detaining authority is that the fear expressed by the witnesses is found to be genuine and correct by the detaining authority. The detaining authority has recorded that it has carefully scrutinized, examined and considered all the materials that were produced before him by the

sponsoring authority. It is, therefore, clear that the detaining authority, while verifying the statements of the witnesses and while considering the question of exercising privilege under Sec. 9 (2) of the P.A.S.A. Act, has not taken any independent steps for considering general background, character, antecedents, criminal tendency etc. while recording subjective satisfaction, but has relied solely on the material produced by the sponsoring authority. There is no contemporaneous record to indicate the steps taken by the detaining authority and the grounds and reasons for arriving at the subjective satisfaction. It is therefore very difficult to conclude that the detaining authority has considered general background, character, antecedents, criminal tendency and propensity etc. of the detenu while arriving at the subjective satisfaction, for the need of exercise of powers under Sec. 9 (2) of the P.A.S.A. Act and claim privilege by not disclosing identity of the anonymous witnesses."

5. The learned advocate for the petitioner has further submitted that, since the aforesaid exercise has not been done by finding out the antecedents of the detenu, the subjective satisfaction arrived at by the detaining authority can be said to be vitiated and, on that ground, the impugned order is required to be quashed and set aside.

6. The learned advocate for the petitioner has further submitted that, in the instant case, except two criminal cases, there is no material on record to show that the petitioner has committed breach of public order. If these cases are considered by the Court, it can only be said that the petitioner has violated the law and order situation under the Bombay Prohibition Act, but it cannot be said that the petitioner has committed breach of any public order. In this connection, the learned advocate for the petitioner has relied upon a decision rendered by a Division Bench of this Court in LPA No.223 of 2000, wherein, in paragraph 5, this Court held as under:

"5. If we examine the present case on the anvil of the test which has been applied by the Supreme Court in the case of K.S.Zala v. State of Gujarat (Supra), i.e. with regard to the presence of credible material and as to how the

detaining authority has made the mention against the appellant being an obstruction to the public health and public order, we find that in the instant case so far as the statements of the witnesses which were recorded with regard to unregistered cases, that ground has been rejected by the learned Single Judge himself. It is, of course, true that after narrating the particulars of the criminal cases, the detaining authority has mentioned that the activities of the appellant were an obstacle to the public health and public order, but this bald observation cannot be taken to be decisive so as to arrive at the satisfaction that the activities of the petitioner were prejudicial to the public order or public health and that tempo of public life was disturbed. No observation made in any part of the judgement can be read in isolation and bereft the context. The judgement is to be read as a whole and even the observations which have been made by the Supreme Court in para 6 of the judgement are to be considered in light of the earlier observations made in para 5 where presence of credible material before the detaining authority has been insisted upon. Thus, litmus test to find out as to whether it is a case of breach of public order or breach of public health is concerned, credible material has to be there. In the case of K.S.Zala before the Supreme Court, the detaining authority had also relied upon the statements of the witnesses so as to show that violence resorted to by the petitioner in that case had disturbed the even tempo of public life and the material on record had shown that members of the public of those localities had to run away from there and to go inside their houses and to close their doors. No such fact situation has been mentioned in the present case and the ground with regard to the statements of the three witnesses has been rejected by the learned Single Judge himself and it has been held that there had been violation or infringement of the petitioner's right against such statements. In this view of the matter whatsoever said by the three witnesses with regard to unregistered cases and with regard to the three incidents referred to hereinabove, it cannot be considered to be the material germane for the purpose of consideration of the threat to the public health and public order. Thus, the only material which remains is the registered

> criminal cases and that by itself cannot be said to be a material for the purpose of holding that the appellant's activities had become a threat to the public order and public health. Necessary material in this regard is totally wanting in the body of the detention order itself. In large number of cases, the Supreme Court has considered that involvement in bootlegging activities even if coupled with violence does not amount to threat to public order or public health. The mere mention of allegations unless they are supported by any material cannot be said to be material germane for the purpose of arriving at the satisfaction with regard to breach of public order or public health and we find that after giving particulars of criminal cases, the detaining authority by including certain allegations, not supported by any credible material has simply observed that the appellant's activities were an obstacle to the public health and public order. In this view of the matter keeping in view the observations made by the Supreme Court in the case of K.S.Zala v. State of Gujarat (supra) itself in paras 4 and 5, we do not find that it can be held to be a case of breach of public health and public order. Learned counsel for the appellant has also argued several other points before us, but we do not find it necessary to go into those grounds. It may be mentioned that it was not a case of breach of public order or public health and it was not argued before the learned Single Judge. Even if that be so, in such matters, the point which arises on the face of the facts of the case by the body of the order itself, which does not require further investigation of the facts, can certainly be allowed to be raised and we allow learned counsel for the appellant to raise this point and find that this point is not without substance. The impugned order passed by the learned single Judge upholding the detention order therefore, cannot be said to be in consonance with the settled position of law. The detention order deserves to be quashed and set aside on this ground alone. We, therefore, do not go into other grounds which were raised on behalf of the appellants."

7. It is required to be noted that the averments made in the petition are not even controverted by the respondents by filing any reply and considering the fact

that the petitioner is involved in the aforesaid two criminal cases under the Prohibition Act, it cannot be said that the petitioner is guilty of committing breach of public order or even it cannot be said that the activities of the petitioner are injurious to public health. Over and above the aforesaid aspect, even on the ground of not disclosing the names of witnesses by claiming privilege under sec.9(2) of the PASA, the petition is required to be allowed, on the ground that the petitioner is denied his right to make an effective representation.

8. For the foregoing reasons, this petition is allowed. The order of detention dated 17.2.2004 is quashed and set aside. The detenu, Anilbhai Chhaganbhai Maharaj, is ordered to be set at liberty forthwith, if he is not required in connection with any other case. Rule is made absolute.

(P.B. Majmudar, J.)

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